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EXPERIENCES OF GAY MEN: THROUGH THE EYES OF SELF AND OTHERS

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Experiences of Gay Men: Through the Eyes of Self and Others

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Message from the Desk of Editor

It gives me great opportunity to present the forth volume of IJIP, the measure of progress. The concept of a Journal of Indian Psychology has been developing for over few years and finally another issue has come to fruition. From this edition we have ISSN for online 2348-5396 and print 2349-3429, ZDB-No.: 2775190-9, IDN: 1052425984, CODEN: IJIPD3, OCLC: 882110133, WorldCat Accession: (DE-600) ZDB2775190-9, ResearchID: P-8455-2015 in our publication. RedShine Publication, Inc is grateful to the contributors for making this Journal a reality.

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The Journal would publish peer-reviewed original research papers, case reports, systematic reviews and meta-analysis. Editorial, Guest Editorial, Viewpoint and letter to the editor are solicited by the editorial board. Large numbers of research papers were received from all over the globe for publication and we thank each one of the authors personally for soliciting the journal. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the reviewers and members of the editorial board who so carefully perused the papers and carried out justified evaluation. Based on their evaluation, we could accept some research papers for this issue across the disciplines. We are certain that these papers will provide qualitative information and thoughtful ideas to our accomplished readers. We thank all the readers profusely who conveyed their appreciation on the quality and content of the journal and expressed their best wishes for future issues. We convey our deep gratitude to the Editorial Board, Advisory Board and all office bearers who have made possible the publication of this journal in the planned time frame.

We humbly invite all the authors and their professional colleagues to submit their research papers for consideration for publication in our upcoming issues as per the “Scope and Guidelines to Authors” given at the website. Any comments and observations for the improvement of the journal are most welcome.

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ABSTRACT

The present research was conducted to understand the lives of gay men through their life experiences and to explore the views and concerns of the society regarding homosexuality. Orientation of sexual activities or feelings towards others of the same sex exist in all cultures. Currently, most sociologists believe that one's sexual orientation whether homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual, results from a complex interplay between biological factors and social learning. In India, issues related to sexuality and sexual behavior have for a long time been seen through the lens of western framework. In India, sexuality is primarily defined within the frameworks of gender roles and reproductive sex, rather than in sexual orientation. This study was an effort to understand homosexuality beyond these frameworks. The purpose of the study was to focus on the context of the nature of same sex love in our society, and to get an in-depth understanding the research was restricted to gay men. The study was conducted in Delhi/NCR. The sample comprised of twenty five gay men in the age group of 18-35 years, twenty five straight people (13 women and 12 men) in the age group of 18-65 years and six professionals (school counselors, clinical psychologists and psychiatrist), taking the total number of participants to fifty six. The findings revealed that the childhood of the sample comprising of gay men was quite different in terms of their interests, interaction patterns with parents and peer group. A considerably large fraction of participants were subjected to harassment at least once in their life which can be linked to their gender non conforming roles. There was no consensus in the attraction patterns which reiterated that every individual is different. Image conflict among participants was prevalent. Reflection by participants on the "coming out" phase revealed unanimous experiences that led to stress and discrepancy with regard to the need of coming out to others. Most however acknowledged the need of support systems in their lives that helped them to come to terms with their sexuality. The participants reported concerns that came their way as consequences of being gay. The legal status of homosexuality complicates their lives further. Majority of the straight participants had the knowledge of homosexuality, and were seen to be indifferent towards it and showed considerable acceptance. The professionals had information about the meaning of homosexuality whereas disparity was seen in their belief of what caused homosexuality which decided the approach they adopted when they come across gay people in their practice. It was concluded that though gay men are one of us and an integral part of the society, their lives have different facets. The attitude of the society is changing and efforts are being put to bridge the heterosexual-homosexual gap. However, it was felt that the need of the hour is for professionals to widen their horizons and to have a comprehensive approach in dealing with homosexuality as this can have a significant impact on the lives of gay men.

Keywords- *Homosexuality, Gender roles, Attitude, Childhood, Coming Out, Legal Status*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

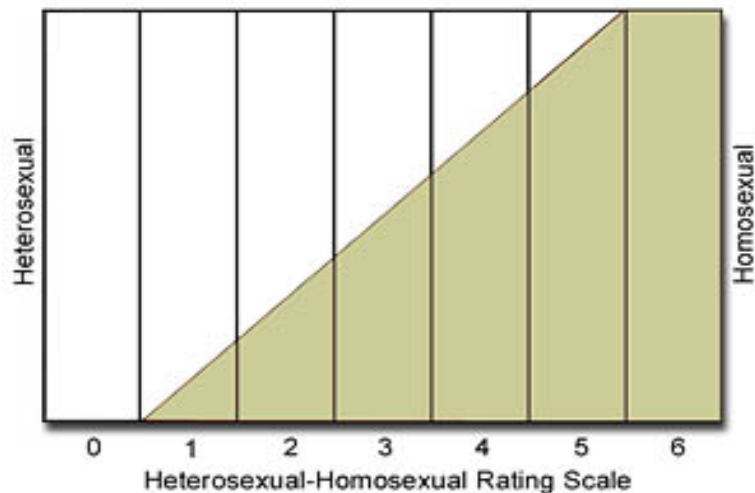
Homosexuality

Remafedi, defined homosexual orientation as a “consistent pattern of sexual arousal towards persons of the same gender encompassing fantasy, conscious attractions, emotional and romantic feelings and sexual behaviors” (cited in Meece, 2002).

In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, and gay for men though gay is also used to refer generally to both homosexual males and females. For the present study the term “gay men” is used to denote a group of homosexual men as it the most widely used collective noun for the group to denote itself and it is considered the most accepted colloquial in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

Until the end of the 19th century, many people thought that people were either homosexual or heterosexual (Gordon, 1989). Today, the belief is that sexual orientation lies among a continuum- a wide range with infinite degrees between the two extremes of exclusively heterosexual attraction and exclusively homosexual desire.

Figure 1.



Source: Kinsey, 1948

- 0= Exclusively heterosexual behavior
- 1= Largely heterosexual, but incidental homosexual behavior
- 2=Largely heterosexual, but more than incidental homosexual behavior
- 3=Equal amounts of heterosexual and homosexual behavior
- 4=Largely homosexual, but more than incidental heterosexual behavior
- 5=Largely homosexual, but incidental heterosexual behavior
- 6= Exclusively homosexual behavior

Kinsey (1948) applied a scale of 0 to 6 to this continuum, with 0 representing exclusive heterosexuality and 6 representing exclusive homosexuality

Coleman (1990) considers nine dimensions in sexual orientation which are as follows:

1. Lifestyle or current relationship status
2. Self-identification of current sexual orientation
3. One's idealized sexual orientation
4. Degree of self acceptance of one's current sexual orientation identity
5. Physical sexual identity
6. Gender identity
7. Sex role identity
8. Current sexual behavior, fantasies and emotional attachments
9. Past and idealized future sexual identities

Although some of these categories overlap and it becomes difficult to distinguish from each other, this construction illustrates the complexity inherent in sexual orientation.

Development of Sexual Orientation

Despite considerable research on sexual orientation, the development of various orientations is still uncertain. Over the years, many theories on sexual orientation have been proposed. These theories can be categorized as biological, psychological, or cultural, although this compartmentalization is somewhat unrealistic. Each of these categories influences the other, and all seem to influence the choice of sexual partners.

Biological Theories

During the 1990s the likelihood that biological factors contribute to the development of sexual orientation had received increasing emphasis. Evidence that biology plays at least some role has come from preliminary studies linking measurable differences in the size of several parts of the brain to sexual orientation.

The genetic theory: The genetic theory of the cause of homosexuality states that something in a person's genes causes that person to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex. Kallman (1952) studied twins (both fraternal and identical) who grew up in the same home. Fraternal twins do not share an exact genetic inheritance, whereas identical twins do share the same genetic material. Consequently, the environments are the same for both sets of twins but the difference is in the genetic makeup. He found identical twins had a 95 percent concordance (both twins being homosexual) compared to a 12 percent concordance rate for fraternal twins. He concluded that homosexuality is a function of genetic predisposition.

Whitman (1986) reported a concordance rate of 75 percent for identical twins and a 19 percent rate for fraternal twins; thereby supporting the genetic theory. However, numerous other studies

over the years (Heston, 1968) have not been able to verify Kallman's findings. Furthermore, Kallman's selection of twins for his studies was criticized. He chose twins from prisons, psychiatric settings and charitable organizations, thereby restricting the ability to generalize his results to twins living in more usual situations. Sexuality experts today generally agree there is no convincing evidence that there is a genetic predisposition towards homosexuality.

The neuro-hormonal theory: The hormonal theory of the cause of homosexuality states that homosexuality is a result of hormonal imbalances, either prenatally or after birth. Since it is known that prenatal hormone treatment in animals can lead to different male and female behavior pattern (Money, 1972), some theorists have concluded that these same conditions might cause homosexuality. Evidence for this view can be found in the work of several researchers. For instance, (Dornor, 1975) studied the responses of homosexuals and heterosexuals to injections of the hormone estrogen and found the responses to differ.

Gorski (1978) had identified a region of the rat POA which was sexually dimorphic. Seven years later in 1985 at the Netherlands Institute for Brain Research it was identified that a nucleus in the POA is larger in men than women which they named the sexually dimorphic nucleus (SDN). However when Gorski examined the human POA he was unable to decide which of the several nuclei there might be homologous to the sexually dimorphic nucleus in the rat. For this reason he named the four neuron groups of the human POA the interstitial nuclei of the anterior hypothalamus (INAH) and numbered them in sequence with the SDN in humans as INAH-1. Further studies by Gorski found INAH-3 to be larger in men than women but failed to find a sexual dimorphism in INAH-1.

These results all paved the way for LeVay's influential study of 1991 comparing the hypothalamic structure of the brains of heterosexual and homosexual men. It is this study in particular which was to be a major milestone in the study of homosexuality even though the significance of LeVay's results is still unclear to this day. Using brain tissue from homosexual and heterosexual men who had died of AIDS (at that time the only reliable way of obtaining homosexual brain material) LeVay examined the four INAH neuron groups. In doing so not only was he able to replicate Gorski's finding that INAH-3 was larger in men than women but he also found that this nucleus was on average twice as large in heterosexual men compared to homosexual men. That is to say that INAH-3 in homosexual men was nearly identical in size to the same nucleus in heterosexual women, potentially a highly significant result.

Furthermore, Gladue (1983) found that when homosexual men were administered estrogen, their patterns of secretion of luteinizing hormone (LH) changed to be more like those of heterosexual women; in addition, their testosterone levels remained lower for a longer time when both groups were administered estrogen. Studies have also found that a prenatal excess of androgen in

females is associated with a greater incidence of lesbianism and that a prenatal deficiency in androgen production in males is associated with an increased incidence of male homosexuality.

Psychological Theories

Psychological factors are certainly recognized as influencing how sexuality is expressed. Many psychological theories on sexual orientation have been proposed, but none has gained universal acceptance. Perhaps a number of these theories are valid for at least some people. Psychological theories on sexual orientation often presume that the normal pattern of development is towards a heterosexual orientation and that a homosexual orientation is the result of something going astray in that development.

The psychoanalytic theory: Psychoanalytic theories of the cause of homosexuality relate to the parental and family characteristics. Sigmund Freud postulated that everyone was born with the potential to be bisexual. Whether or not someone become heterosexual, or homosexual was, Freud believed, a result of circumstances that affected the child's psychosexual development. For example, if a young boy was unable to satisfactorily resolve the Oedipal complex and become "fixated" at this phase of psychosexual development, or fear castration, he might grow up to be homosexual.

Beiber (1962) fueled this view of the influence of family background when he compared the family backgrounds of 106 homosexual to 100 heterosexual men and found differences. Specifically, Bieber found that homosexual men more often had over protective and dominant mothers and weak, passive and detached fathers than did heterosexual men. Bieber hypothesized that this family upbringing made men homosexual because they were fearful of interacting with women and unable to identify with their fathers. The problem with Bieber's study was the manner in which he acquired his sample of homosexual men. Since there is a social stigma associated with homosexuality, thereby making many homosexuals unwilling to admit to their preference, it has often been difficult to find gay men and women to study. Consequently, homosexual samples have in the past too frequently been obtained from either psychiatric settings, prisons or the military.

The Learned Behavior Theory

Behaviorists believe homosexuality is the result of situations experienced and reinforced throughout one's life, usually early in childhood. For example, someone may experience an unsuccessful and unsatisfying heterosexual relationship that leads them to experiment with homosexuality, where they find satisfaction. The attitude of many people is "if they only had an effective lover, they'd never be homosexual." Others believe homosexuals are physically unattractive to the opposite sex, so their only sexual outlet is someone of the same sex. Dew (1985) found that many college students possessed this view. Others believe that an early childhood homosexual experience "recruits" people to homosexuality.

Studies are not supportive of these viewpoints. Homosexuals do not differ from heterosexual in terms of how often they dated in high school (Bell, 1981). They often report having had sexual experiences with people of the opposite sex, and they are not seduced into homosexuality as children. On the other hand, females who are raped are more likely to shift their sexual orientation to lesbianism, and this lends evidence to the viewpoint that experiences can lead to homosexuality.

Integrated Theories

The integrated theory of the development of sexuality, homosexuality being just one form, argues that physical, psychological, and learned factors are involved. It describes societies in which homosexuality is a precursor of heterosexuality. For example, in the Pacific between Sumatra through Papua New Guinea and Melanesia, homosexuality is institutionalized. Males between the age of nine and nineteen move out of their family home into long houses in the centre of the village. There they engage regularly in homosexual activity until they reach the marriage age (nineteen). After marriage, homosexuality activity stops or is kept to a minimum. Likewise the Sambian people in the eastern part of New Guinea require a boy just prior to puberty to give up his mother's milk for the "milk" (semen) of men. That is the only way the boy can grow and mature into a head-hunting man. In fact, omission of this phase would stigmatize the man as deviant, rather than stigmatizing him as deviant for participating. In the examples cited above, homosexuality is a normal part of society and is learned behavior. Still, there is evidence presented by integrated theorists of the biological aspects of homosexuality.

Experiments in certain animals have shown that the brain can develop in contrast to the body morphology. In one such study, pregnant lambs were injected with testosterone at a critical point in the pregnancy and the resulting ewe was homosexual. That is, its brain was masculinized and it acted just like ram in its mating and urinating behavior. However, it possessed ovaries that secreted estrogen.

Integrationists, then conclude that the prenatal influence on sexuality is important, but that it plays out in a social context. Therefore, sexuality is a function of the interaction of all these factors: biology, hormones, cultural expectations, learned behavior and psychological variables.

Cultural Theories

Information on sexual orientation in most of the world's past or present societies is scarce and often unreliable. This lack of knowledge stems from the fear and prejudice surrounding the study of human sexual behavior and from the difficulties associated with the collection of information on a subject that is regarded as personal in most societies.

Cross-cultural data on homosexual behavior also have been complicated by the prejudice of some observers who have considered homosexuality to be unnatural or immoral. Also, in many

of the societies studied, homosexuality has been stigmatized and thus not openly practiced or discussed.

Different expectations for males and females exist in every known society. Although the behavioral boundaries between sexes vary considerably from culture to culture, there is a general expectation in every society that most adult men and women will cohabit (live together) and produce the next generation. Social pressure is thus applied for members to engage in heterosexual behavior. The general rule is that one should have a mate of the other sex and produce children.

Carrier (1980) reports three major types of societies with regard to the type of response made to homosexual behavior: that which basically accepts homosexual behavior; that which outlaws such behavior as scandalous and /or criminal; and that which neither accepts nor outlaws homosexual behavior, but has a cultural formulation that tries to ensure that homosexuality does not occur.

Those behaviors that are considered to be homosexual vary from culture to culture. What is considered homosexuality in one culture may be considered appropriate behavior within gender roles in another culture. For example, in the United States, fellatio and anal intercourse between two males is generally (unless force is involved) considered homosexual behavior for both parties. However, in Mexico, Brazil, Greece, Turkey and Morocco, only the passive recipient (insertee) is considered homosexual while the active insertor is not. Further, some societies, such as those in the highlands of New Guinea, have incorporated what in many cultures are considered homosexual acts into their male rituals. For example, the swallowing of semen through Fellatio by young males is considered essential for proper growth, strength and masculinity.

Finally, few cultures perceive the distinction between gender role behavior and sexual orientation. Gender role behavior is how closely one conforms to his or her culture's stereotyped concepts of appropriate male or female behavior. One's choice of career, mannerisms and general life-style make up gender role behavior. Not included are one's attraction to sexual partners; this is one's sexual orientation. In most cultures, however, people assume that someone who behaves in nonsexual ways that are more characteristics of the other sex must also desire homosexual relationships over heterosexual activities.

Regardless of whatever biological and/or psychological factors may eventually be proved to influence sexual orientation, culture provides another dimension that cannot be ignored.

Emergence of Sexual Orientation

If sexual orientation is mainly biologically determined, then the process is probably completed very early in life, probably before birth. It still might, however, take many years before a person is consciously aware of his or her orientation or feels comfortable with it. If sexual orientation is mainly psychologically determined, then the process could continue throughout life, possibly explaining why some people who always thought of themselves as heterosexual become aware of a homosexual orientation at a very advanced age.

Homosexual Coming Out

“Coming out” is the process of accepting and affirming a homosexual identity and deciding how open to be about that identity. In addition to developing friendships within the gay or lesbian community, telling friends and family about one’s homosexuality, and being open about one’s homosexuality at school or workplace is also included.

Homosexual Identity Formation

A gay or lesbian identity is the sense that a person may have of being homosexual. It is a very personal sensation, experienced as a feeling of “who I am.” Adopting a homosexual identity reflects not only how a person views him or herself, but also his or her personal definition of what constitutes homosexuality.

Cass (1990) named the following six stages in developing a homosexual identity.

1. Identity Confusion- Stage 1 begins when a person recognizes “there is something about my thoughts, feelings, and/or actions that might be called homosexual” and ends when he or she believes “I may be homosexual.”
2. Identity Comparison- Stage 2 takes a person from “I may be homosexual” to “I probably am homosexual.” This stage is the first step towards a commitment to a homosexual self-image. Contemplating a possible loss of family and social support provokes feelings of social alienation.
3. Identity Tolerance - Stage 3 takes a person from “I probably am homosexual” to “I am homosexual” The individual begins to feel the minority status of a gay or lesbian person and develops a tolerance of his or her homosexual identity rather than an acceptance of it.
4. Identity Acceptance- Stage 4 is characterized by a clearer and more positive image of one’s self as homosexual and greater security in carrying out a homosexual role. There is increasing contact with gay or lesbian community and development of a network of homosexual friends. The world comes to be seen as clearly divided between homosexual people (likely to be supportive) and non homosexual people (likely to be hostile). Some gay and lesbian people avoid heterosexual hostility by keeping their homosexuality more or less secret. Their identity development ends here at stage 4. Others who are bothered by the inconsistency between their own positive feelings and the possible negative feelings of straight society move on to the next stage of identity development.

5. **Identity Pride-** In response to the feeling of alienation from the straight society, feelings of pride and anger are generated. Pride is felt towards oneself and other homosexual people. Anger is felt about the negative status assigned to homosexuality by some heterosexual people. This leads to disclosure of homosexuality and confrontation with the straight society. If this disclosure and confrontation evoke negative responses, this reinforces negative beliefs about heterosexual people and identity development ends at this point. If, however, positive relations with heterosexual people occur, this creates an inconsistency which leads to the final development stage.
6. **Identity Synthesis-** In stage 6, being homosexual is integrated into a broader sense of identity; homosexuality is an important part of one's self, but is not the entire self. The "them and us" attitude adopted in stage 4 is abandoned and interactions with the heterosexual world is seen as generally rewarding. Feelings of anger are less overwhelming. One's homosexuality is disclosed in most situations. As one's public and private identity become the same, a new sense of well being and internal peace develops.

Homosexual Lifestyles

Not all homosexuals are alike or live alike, any more than do heterosexuals. Bell & Weinberg (1978) studied 979 homosexual men and women and found that about 75 percent of them could be assigned to one of the following categories based on established statistical criteria:

1. **Close coupled homosexuals-** They have a close relationship with one partner, regard themselves as "happily married", have few problems, and appear to be the best adjusted of the group.
2. **Open coupled homosexuals-** They live in a stable relationship with one person but have many outside sexual partners. This is most prevalent among males.
3. **Functional homosexuals-** They are not coupled, have high number of sexual partners and little interest in settling down. They tend to be young, with a high degree of sexual interest.
4. **Dysfunctional homosexual-** They are not coupled, have large number of sexual partners and are very active sexually, but have major problems with their sexual performance, and often have serious emotional and social problems and are sexually dissatisfied with their way of life.
5. **Asexual homosexuals-** They are loners, either by choice or because they could not find a partner, are closeted homosexuals, seldom interact with other homosexuals and tend to be less exclusively homosexual.

Homophobia

Many of the difficulties homosexual people experience in society arise from a condition called homophobia, an unrealistic fear of homosexuality experienced by many heterosexual individuals. Homophobia may have different causes. One cause is simply fear of unknown. Part of our basic human nature may be to feel threatened by anything we do not fully understand, and few straight people take the time or interest to gain knowledge about homosexuality.

In particular, some people believe that homosexuality is a behavior that is chosen by a conscious act of will or that is “caught” from others, perhaps by modeling oneself after homosexual individuals to whom one has been exposed. Another factor that may be partially responsible for homophobia is childhood conditioning. In some cases, even the religious training may instill prejudice against homosexuality.

Another problem contributing to homophobia is that homosexual people so seldom conform to the stereotypes about them and it is the main reason homosexuality is so alarming to some people. They hear much about what homosexuality is like, but they also meet or hear about homosexual people who do not fit in that picture. They begin to wonder whether friends, neighbors and others who look and seem straight are actually homosexual. They even wonder about themselves, if they have ever felt any attraction to someone of the same sex or played adolescent sex games with friends of the same sex, they fear that they themselves maybe homosexual, with all the negative implications they have learned to associate with homosexuality (Marmor, 1980). This group often expresses the greatest hostility towards homosexual people. They are likely to use derogatory names for homosexual people such as “faggot”, “queer”, “dyke” and “fairy”. Their hostility toward homosexuality is thinly disguised, if it is at all.

Professional opinions on Homosexuality

Many people consider homosexuality a disorder or a deviation. Experts on Mental health give a mixed opinion. Some experts who consider it to be a disorder believe that it can be corrected with appropriate treatment whereas others believe that they are born gay and hence it cannot be treated.

A variety of procedures have been used to treat homosexuals. Kaliappan (1982) has reported the successful treatment of homosexuality using covert sensitization procedures. A ten year follow up showed no recurrence of homosexual behavior. Some professionals have reported success with the anticipatory avoidance techniques but were unable to substitute homosexual behavior with appropriate heterosexual interests, (Sakthivel, Rangaswami, and Jayaraman, 1979) have treated four cases using multifaceted anticipatory avoidance technique and desensitization , with complete success in all cases even after a follow up 5-10 months later. (Cited in Pandey, 1988)

Some professionals on the other hand believe that sexual orientation is such a basic part of an individual that it is not easily changed. Isay (1990) reports that efforts to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual through therapy often result in severe anxiety, depression and unhappiness.

Historical Perspective of Homosexuality in India

In the entire South Asian region, a history of tolerance of same sex behavior between consenting adults had existed. It is only with the advent of criminalization of sodomy imposed by colonial powers, the notion of normal and abnormal sexual behaviors as dichotomized state became a reality in public discourse in India.

In shaping Indian customs and tradition, religion has played a decisive role. In the religions texts central to Hinduism, the largest religion in India, homosexuality has not been explicitly mentioned. It (Hinduism) has taken various positions, ranging from positive to neutral or antagonistic. Rig- Veda, one of the four canonical sacred texts of Hinduism says “*Vikriti Evam Prakriti*” (what seems unnatural is also natural), which some scholars believe recognizes the cyclical constancy of homosexual/transsexual dimensions of human life, like all forms of universal diversities. Historical literary evidence indicates that homosexuality has been prevalent across the Indian subcontinent throughout history, and that homosexuals were not necessarily considered inferior in any way.

One of the dominant tropes of same sex love in ancient India is through friendship, often leading to a life of celibacy or the forming of some very intimate relationships. In the ancient Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, Krishna and Arjuna, frequently referred to as ‘the two Krishnas’ reflect bonds of friendship which go beyond marriage and procreation. In fact ‘Krishna clearly states that Arjuna is more important to him than wives, children or kinsmen- there can be many spouses and sons but there is only one Arjuna, without whom he cannot live’. The *Mahabharata*, one of the most important epics in Hinduism has numerous other examples of same sex ‘attachment’. (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000).

However the Krishna and Arjuna friendship remains one of the most important aspects of the epic. A famous conversation in the epic is between Krishna and Arjuna, where Krishna reiterates their inseparability and reveals his divine form to his friend. This collected conversation between the two is the *Bhagvad Gita*, the most widely read Hindu text. When Arjuna’s son is still born, Krishna revives him miraculously, ‘by invoking his own acts of truth and righteousness, foremost amongst which is the perfect love between him and Arjuna’. Thus same sex friendship gives life to a new born in this case instead of heterosexual conjugality.

Another trope which is used to justify same sex love in ancient India is through rebirth. Vanita and Kidwai argue that ‘The concept of previous births serves to legitimize actions perceived as improper in the present life’. Rebirth makes several social constructs and divides less important and love between two people of conflicting gender, class or caste seem involuntary as a result of their past life. In Somadatta’s *Kathasaritsagara*, Somaprabha falls in love with the beautiful princess Kalingasena and attributes this love to her previous birth. ‘I am sure she and I were female friends in previous birth. My mind which is overwhelmed by affection for her, tells me

so'. In this case the two women belong to different class hierarchies and are of the same gender but by attributing their attraction to their previous birth, their same sex desire is legitimized. Same sex desire amongst women is also found in the Bengali text *Kritivasa Ramayana* (Ramayana written by Krittivasa). In the text, the sage Bhagiratha's birth is ascribed to the sexual union between two females.

Bhagiratha's father died before he was conceived and his birth was only possible through divine sanction of the god Sankara, 'You two have intercourse with one another. By my blessings one of you will have a lovely child'. This episode is significant in understanding the cultural setting of ancient India. Whilst normative heterosexuality and marriage still remains the cultural norm, the possibility of transgressive sexual and gender possibilities is also highlighted. However this was legitimized only through divinity.

A third trope is sex change which is again brought through divine intervention. The Hindu deities were multidimensional and fluid in their form and one of their remarkable features was 'their multiplicity and variability'.

Thus a deity might appear in any form- male, female, neuter or even in a nonhuman form. Vishnu, one of the three primary Vedic gods in the Hindu pantheon was also known to take the form of a beautiful woman- Mohini. Shiva, another of the three principle gods, on hearing about his beautiful female form approaches him and asks to see it. Thus he is aware of the ambiguous nature of Mohini's gender and becomes attracted to her and 'followed her as a lordly elephant would a she elephant'. The ambiguity in gender here acts as the agency through which same sex desire between the two gods could be realized. Shiva here is not deceived or unaware of Mohini's true gender but knowingly desires and pursues her. This same sex 'encounter' leads to the birth of Ayyappa, who is born of two men. This legend of the birth was a late medieval addition to the existing story about Shiva and Mohini and it refers to the child as 'ayoni' which refers to non vaginal sex. (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000)

Amongst the vast literary output of Ancient India, another work which has attained a universal recognition is Vatsyana's *Kamasutra*. In reference to non normative sexual practices, the text responds, 'in all things connected with love, everybody should act according to the custom of the country, and his own inclination'. Classic texts such as the *Kamasutra* not only described but even prescribed 'queer' sexual practices such as 'auparishtaka' or mouth congress. What is important to consider about this text is that sexual practices discussed do not necessarily head towards procreation but rather pleasure. Thus non-procreative sexual practice, a form of non-normative or queer deviation from prescribed sexual practice is represented within ancient India.

The *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu), one of the earliest treatise on Hindu law prohibits men from practicing 'ayoni' (non vaginal) sex. However there has been no evidence found so far of anyone being executed or punished in ancient India for same sex relations (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000).

Bhakti movement

During the medieval period, the Bhakti movement was gaining momentum in India. Similar to the Sufi movement in the Perso-Arabic tradition, this movement reframed the perception of god and divinity. The gods were no longer just worshipped as a superior being but were rather seen as friends, lovers, spouse and even child. This opened up fluid intimacies and 'fluidity of gendered structure' between the deity and the devotee. The Bhakti movement opened up new possibilities of reframing and discarding orthodox rigidity.

Through a process of domestication, by making the deity a lover, new forms of intimacy beyond the confines of marriage and family were discovered. Thus poets like Surdas and Tulsidas could sing praises to a male lover who was a divine being whilst female poets like Mirabai and Vithabai could circumvent the strictures imposed on women and marriage. However by incorporating god as a part of the family the devotee conflicted with the traditional reproductive family. It is significant to note that there is an ongoing tension between the devotional family and the biological one.

Surdas writes, "These eyes thirst for a vision of Hari (The god Krishna), wanting to see the lotus eyed one. Grieving for him day and night" If these above lines are taken out of the context of Bhakti, they could easily be read as a poem to a male lover who appears distant and unavailable. Vanita states that male mystic poets envisioned themselves as 'brides of God' (Vanita, 2005) Intense emotional relationships also developed between the disciples and devotees who desired union with god.

Jagannath Das, a fifteenth century Oriya poet and mystic was known for his devotion to Shri Chaitanya (who was seen as the reincarnation of Krishna). In this type of a Vaishnava tradition, Vanita and Kidwai note 'all devotees tend to identify with the female who desires union with the male deity'. Jagannath Das and Chaitanya's love was well documented. Dibakar Das writes about their encounter in Jagannath Charitamrita, 'Overwhelmed with love he held Das in a tight embrace. They stayed in this posture for two days and a half'. In fact Chaitanya addressed Jagannath as his 'sakhi' (female friend).

Perso-Arabic Tradition

Whilst ancient and early medieval Indian materials contain scant or few references to same sex love, the late medieval period with the advent of Islamic culture in India, a huge body of literature on same sex love especially those concerning between men become available. In the latter half of the tenth century, invasions lead by Muslims rulers such as Mahmud of Ghazna

(971-1030 AD) culminated in the establishment of an Islamic culture in India. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna is well celebrated in South Asian history for his military prowess in Central and South Asia, his political alliances with the Hindu Kings and for initiating Islamic rule in the Punjab area.

However people discuss another aspect of the ruler's life which is often glossed over, that is his relationship with his slave Ayaz. They go so far as to make a comparison of their love with some of the timeless (heterosexual) lovers in South Asian history like "*Heer and Ranjha*", "*Laila and Majnu*".

Homoerotic love affairs were very visible during this time and were not mentioned derogatorily. Saleem Kidwai reasons this visibility to the 'cosmopolitanism of urban Islamic culture' (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Urbanization allowed people of varied castes and backgrounds to freely intermingle and most of the queer literature around this time depicted passionate and erotic interaction amongst men of different classes. Whilst Islamic scholars are equivocal about the *Koran's* strong condemnation of homosexuality, there are enough instances within the Perso-Arabic tradition to contradict this viewpoint

Sufism

Love is at the centre of Sufi poetry and spiritualism. In Sufi literature this love is expressed in homoerotic metaphors, however as Kidwai asserts, 'many Sufis insisted that only same gender love could transcend sex and therefore not distract the seeker' (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000).

Abru and Mir Taqi Mir were also prominent in representing homoeroticism in their poems. 'They openly discussed their attraction to males, dwelt on what they found attractive in young males. (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000). Whilst poets like Khusro, Abru and Mir openly referred to the male beloved, others like Hafiz and Attar used the symbolism where the meaning is ambiguous. Attar saw the beauty of god mirrored through the human form. His poems '[oscillate] between the love of a boy and the desire for god'.

Colonial Incursion

The expansion of the British Empire in the eighteenth century also dictated the policies of sexual regulation in the colonies driven by a Victorian 'fanatical purity campaign'. The British Anti Sodomy Law was introduced in Britain in 1860, which reduced the punishment of sodomy from execution to imprisonment, however when enacted in the colonial states like India as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code it was seen as a retrogressive move. Prior to the enactment of this law queer sexuality was accommodated if not approved. As Vanita & Kidwai (2000) point out at most times and places in pre-nineteenth century. In India, love between women and between men, even when disapproved of, was not actively persecuted. As far as it is known, no one has

ever been executed for homosexuality in India'. However with the passing of this law, homosexuality was officially condemned by the state and framed as a criminal activity.

Rationale of the Study

Homosexuality as a strong gender-based subject has been very scarcely researched or documented in India. Despite the several mentions of homosexuality in relics from ancient times, profound and dedicated research to understand the lives of gay men finds very little reference in India. The reasons vary from sensitivity around the subject to the intense intolerance of a major section of the society to homosexuality.

Having known a few gay men as acquaintance and the extensive retributions and challenges they faced, legally as well as socially, I was determined to take on a journey of understanding the unheard, unsaid and undiscovered parts of their lives. In December 2013, when India's top court, the Supreme Court, upheld the introduction of a law that criminalizes gay sex, in a ruling that reversed a landmark 2009 Delhi High Court order which had decriminalized homosexual acts, I knew that research on the subject of homosexuality was the need of the hour as it was a raging matter of national debate. It became all the more imperative for me to uncover the views and concerns of the society at large and the homosexuals who are a part of the same society.

The upsurge in the form of protests, demonstrations, petitions on the Supreme Court verdict on section 377 further intensified my resolve to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of these gay men, what the society effectively thinks of them, what are the legal and social implications of this verdict and how all of it can be traced back to the legal history of homosexuality in India. This research is directed at the following objectives:

1. To understand the lives of gay men in India through their life experiences
2. To explore the views and concerns of the society towards homosexuality
3. To study the understanding of the phenomenon by professionals (clinical psychologists, school counselors, psychiatrist)
4. To trace the legal framework of homosexuality in India.

Operational Definitions

1. Gay Man- In this study the term "Gay Man" denotes a person in the age group 18-35 years, who himself, by his disclosure proclaims to be homosexual.
2. Straight Adult- In this study the term "Straight Adult" denotes a person in the age group 18-65 years who himself/herself by their disclosure proclaim to be heterosexual.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

The present study entitled “Experiences of Gay Men: Through the Eyes of Self and Others” was an exploratory research study. This descriptive study was undertaken with the aim of understanding the lives of gay men through their life experiences and to explore the views and concerns of the society towards homosexuality.

Sample

The sample comprised of twenty five gay men between the ages 18-35 years who were college going students and professionals like “engineers”, “fashion designers”, “teachers” and “doctors” (Refer to Figure 2.) Twenty five straight people between the ages 18-65 years (Refer to Figure 3.) and six professionals (school counselors, clinical psychologists and psychiatrist) were also part of the sample, taking the total number of participants to fifty six. All participants belonged to a middle socio-economic background. The locale of the sample was Delhi-NCR

Figure 2. Age Profile of Gay Men

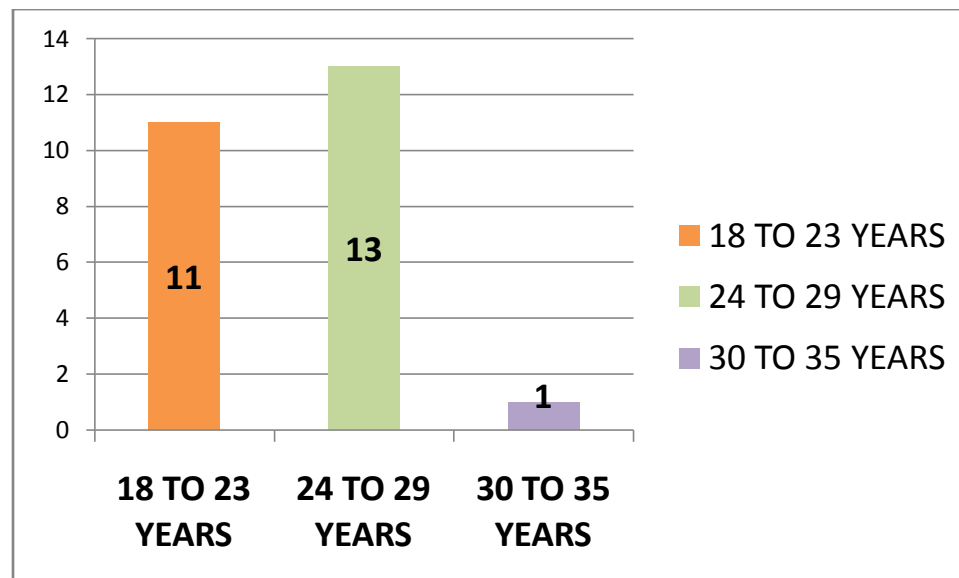
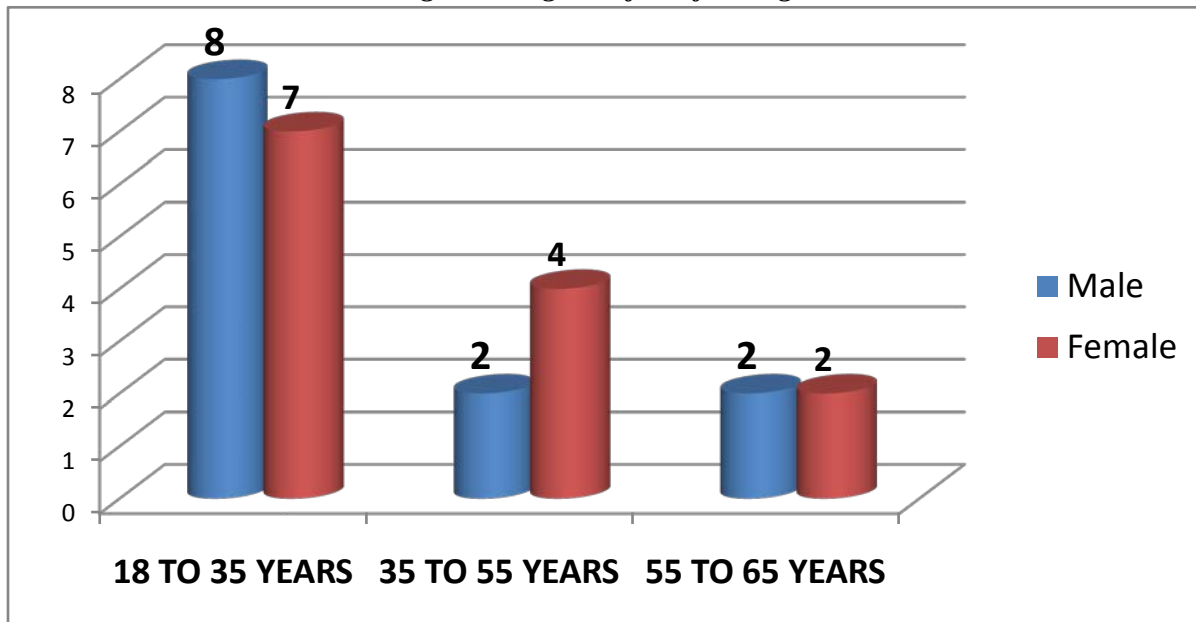


Figure 3. Age Profile of Straight Adults***Sampling Technique***

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods were adopted for obtaining the sample.

Rationale for Selecting Sample

The reasons for restricting the study to gay men were manifold. First and foremost reason was less number of “visible” lesbian women as compared to gay men. The lower incidence of homosexuality in females may reflect the difference in socialization of men and women. Lesbian women, on the average, tend to come out (to recognize and act upon their homosexual attraction) at a later stage. Higher percentages of lesbian women than of gay men have had heterosexual relationships and a higher percentage have married, though their marriages are less happy and shorter than those of gay men. It is possible that lesbian women’s greater heterosexual activity reflects their socialization to accommodate males and to conform to social expectations. It may also reflect women’s lesser degree of freedom to live their lives as they choose. This pattern was very apparent after observing the LGBT community.

Also, this being a small scale study didn’t have the scope of getting an in depth understanding of both gay men and lesbian women as the lives they live, problems they face, concerns they have are quite different from one another. Hence, the study was restricted to gay men.

The age group 18-35 years for gay men was chosen as talking to individuals who were less than 18 years about any issue would need consent from their parents as well. Mastering emerging sexual feelings and forming a sense of sexual identity is multifaceted (Brooks- Gunn & Paikoff, 1997; Graber & Brooks- Gunn, 2002). This lengthy process involves learning to manage sexual feelings, such as sexual arousal and attraction, developing new forms of intimacy, and learning

the skills to regulate sexual behavior to avoid undesirable consequences. Sexual identities emerge in the context of physical factors, social factors, and cultural factors. By 18 years of age mostly people have attained a sexual identity. (Cited in Santrock, 2007)

There are NGOs that work with gay men but none of them were contacted for obtaining the sample. After meeting a few people at various organizations it was felt that the ones who are a part of an organization have some formal support in their life and their issues might be very different from individuals who have never had any intervention in any way. The gay men who have become affiliated with an organization tend to think of their problems as a group problem and therefore social rather than an individual one. In such cases, they experience less fear or conflict if any and may accept their homosexual behavior as a natural sexual pattern. They may even take pride in their homosexual behavior and consider themselves “emancipated” from conventional heterosexual morality. For exploring the views and concerns of the society the age group 18-65 years was chosen to gain a broader view across all generations.

Tools for Data Collection

- 1. In-depth Interview for Gay Men:** A detailed interview schedule comprising of 40 questions was prepared to gain an understanding of lives of gay men through their life experiences. In-depth interviewing is, ‘repeated face to face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words’. Because of repeated contacts and extended length of time spent with an informant, it is assumed that the rapport between researcher and informant will be enhanced, and that the corresponding understanding and confidence between the two will lead to in-depth and accurate information. A life span approach was adopted while preparing the tool. It had questions about all life stages, from childhood to the stage the participants were in at the time of the study. Most of the questions were open ended as it allowed respondents to express themselves freely, virtually reducing the possibility of investigator bias.
- 2. Structured Interview for Straight people:** An interview schedule comprising of 13 questions was prepared to explore the views and concerns of the society. It covered major areas like knowledge about homosexuality, concerns regarding homosexuality and hypothetical situations that expected them to give an answer by imagining themselves in direct contact with homosexuality in one way or the other. All the questions were open-ended and it was planned to be a structured interview so that it provides uniform information, which assured the comparability of data across all age groups.
- 3. Structured Interview for Professionals:** An interview schedule comprising of 6 questions was prepared to study the understanding of the phenomenon by professionals. It was kept very brief and to the point. It also had open ended questions. A structured interview was used to get uniform information so that the data could be compared and analyzed.

4. **Participant Observation:** To get a firsthand experience of the lives of gay men, participant observations were used as a tool. This was done by going to various events like Pride parades, protests, monthly meetings, talks on LGBT issues, movie screening of queer cinema and cultural events. Brief notes were taken while observing the interactions and soon after the observation detailed notes in narrative form were prepared. This tool was used only to gain a deeper insight into the lives of gay men and not for interpreting the interaction and drawing conclusions from it.
5. **Review of Legal Documents:** To get a legal perspective of homosexuality in India, the sections in the constitution dealing with homosexuality were thoroughly reviewed. The High Court and Supreme Court verdicts were also read and analyzed.

Procedure for Data Collection

For any straight individual to enter the LGBT community is very tough. This was further aggravated for me due to me being a researcher interested in their lives. A lot of problems were faced in the initial stage. Right after the research proposal was accepted, people who had been an integral part of the LGBT community were contacted. At the first step, I was added to many secret LGBT groups on various social networking sites. One can only become a member of these groups through an invite. The groups on social networking sites act as a platform for the members of the LGBT community to communicate their thoughts and feelings, share their problems, meet more like minded people from the entire country and also provide information about the events organized the community.

Being a part of these groups gave me an opportunity to observe the lives of the people as an insider. On 24th November 2013, the annual Delhi Pride Parade was organized. The parade celebrates the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender culture and pride. It also serves as demonstrations for legal rights. The pride parade, from far looked like a festival all together, people were hugging each other, throwing colors, dancing and singing. Some men wore sparkling saris, women sported rainbow dresses and hundreds of people chanted for gay rights on a short walk through Delhi's centre. But fear of ostracism was evident amongst many marchers who preferred to wear masks to conceal their identity.

Figure 4. Fifth Annual Delhi Pride Parade



Approximately two weeks after the pride parade, on 11th December 2013 the Supreme Court verdict came out. This created havoc in the lives of members of the LGBT community as the verdict went back to its criminalization under section 377. An emergency protest was called out for on the 15th December 2013.

The sample comprising of straight people were from all walks of life. Again, homosexuality being a very sensitive topic, most of the people approached, did not wish to talk about it or just said that they don't have any clue about it. Interviews were conducted with the ones who were willing to talk. Here also freedom was given to the participants to skip a question if he/she didn't feel like answering it.

The sample comprising of the professionals was obtained by approaching various institutions, followed by taking permissions from senior authorities and it was followed by interviewing the professionals. Special attention was paid to respect varied opinions and avoid being judgmental. Everyone was given the freedom to express their views and concerns without feeling threatened.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study an attempt was made to understand the lives of gay men and to explore the views and concerns of the society regarding homosexuality. Interviews and observations were the tools used to facilitate the data collection. The exploratory nature of the study warranted descriptions and narratives. These emerged through the observations and interviews that were undertaken. The data collected was subjected to content analysis. Qualitative analysis helped in building a picture of what life is like for gay men in India. From the analysis of the data, several themes were identified. Then the findings were organized and categorized under various headings. Verbatim responses were used extensively to support the findings. The findings of the study are presented under the following categories:

Life of Gay Men

Childhood

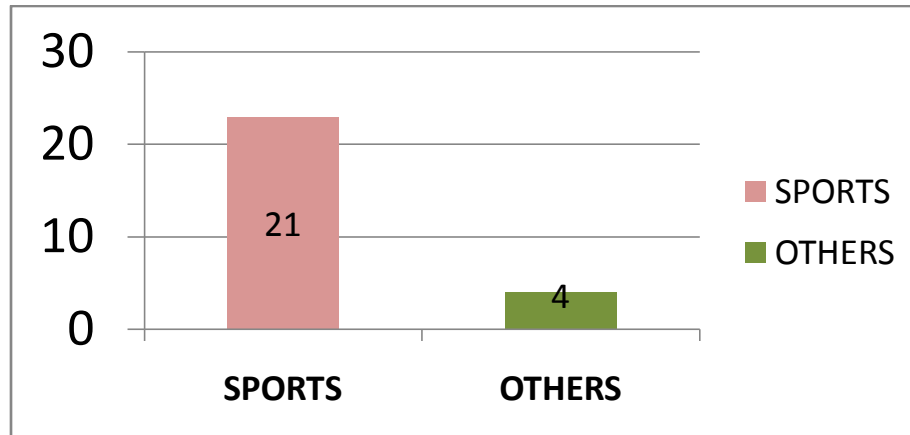
Likes and dislikes

It was found that gay men reported greater gender atypical interests, behaviors than heterosexual men, for example greater interest in aesthetics and domestic activities, more emotional expression and sensitivity and less male typical interests such as guns, fishing , politics and sports.

Roberts et al. (1987) studied a group of boys who showed strong preference for female toys and playmates from the earliest years of life. When they compared these boys to a group of boys with more typical masculine sex role behaviors, they found little evidence that the more feminine boys had not been specifically reinforced for these behaviors, nor their fathers were providing models for such behavior. Instead they found that three fourth of the feminine boys became homosexual in orientation as adults. (cited in Bee, 1994)

The present study showed similar results. Twelve participants mentioned playing with Barbie dolls/stuffed toys and recalled it as being one of the most favorite activities they indulged in as a child. Seven of the participants liked dressing up like girls or draping clothes on dolls or sister/mother. Six of the participants mentioned other activities as their likes in childhood like painting, singing, dancing, cooking, gizmos and helping their mothers in household chores.

The lack of interest in activities like sports emerged as a major finding. Twenty one participants said that they hated sports. (Refer to Figure. 5). A few of them talked about hatred towards their father as well. Out of the 21 participants, 14% hated their father and sports. One participant said that “*My dad is a jungle, he hit me for no reason*”(My dad is a wild person, he hit me for no reason)

Figure 5. Dislikes in Childhood

On being asked to mention any sport that they liked, thirteen participants said that the only sport they enjoyed was “Cycling”, “Swimming” or “Skating”. It is important to see the common factor in all these sports i.e. all of them can be/ are played alone. All the participants believed that they could never play sports which are played in teams. They said that “*there was never a liking for formal sports such as cricket or soccer*”, “*koi mujhe khilata nahi tha, fir maine akele hi khelna shuru kar diya*” (Nobody used to make me play with them, then I started playing alone), “*jab main unke saath khelta tha toh sab mera mazak udate they*” (when I used to play with them, they made fun of me).

It can be seen that the reasons for developing a dislike towards sports are varied. Some participants didn’t like it because of their personal inclinations whereas others didn’t like it because others didn’t let them play in the team or made fun of them when they tried to be a part of the team.

Relationship with parents: Attachment theory proposes that parenting quality is an important influence on child development and subsequent adult relationships. There are only a handful of empirical studies looking at attachment processes in gay men (Landolt, 1997). Recollections of childhood experiences with parents are generally predictive of adult attachment orientations in heterosexual samples (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and there is no reason not to expect that the same processes would be observed in the development of gay men. Colgan (1987) proposed that gay men experience difficulties in intimate relationships because of negative responses from family and peers to gender nonconformity in childhood. Colgan described gay men’s interpersonal difficulties in terms of over attachment and over separation in close relationships.

A small body of literature indicates that gay men report more rejecting and distant childhood relationships with their fathers than do heterosexual men (Evans, 1969). Findings regarding the mother–son relationship are more equivocal. Some studies indicate that gay and heterosexual samples report similar maternal behaviors (Milic & Crowne, 1986), others suggest that mothers

of gay men are more enmeshed in their relationships with their sons (Evans, 1969). Research has indicated an association between gender nonconformity and lower quality father-son relationships in gay samples (Beard & Bakeman, 2000).

Although mothers do find sons' non gender conforming behavior more distressing, they do not intervene to the same extent as fathers do (Tauber, 1979). As a result, mother-son relationships may not be as affected by sons' gender nonconforming behavior. A couple of studies have found associations between gender nonconformity and excessive maternal warmth rather than maternal rejection (Thompson et al., 1973).

In the present study the findings regarding parental attachment affirm the research studies mentioned before. It was found that sixteen participants were extremely close to their mothers. Participants said that *“jaisa main hun, sirf meri ma ne mujhe waisa accept kiya hai”* (Only my mother has accepted the way I am), *“she is my best friend”*, *“she is the best thing that has ever happened to me, I wouldn't have survived in this cruel world without her”*

Two participants were close to their fathers, and in both the cases the mother disapproved of the gender non conforming behaviors. Other seven participants were either close to their sisters, grandparents or nanny.

Friendship patterns: In the present study the following friendship patterns were the most common. Nineteen participants had more girls as friends and preferred being in small groups during childhood. The reasons stated for such a friendship pattern by all the participants was that they found comfort in being with girls as girls understood them better, were more sensitive and never made fun of them.

Three participants had more girls as friends and preferred being in large groups which included boys as well. Two participants had more boys as friends and had large groups and one participant didn't have friends throughout his childhood because nobody wanted to befriend him and eventually he started liking his own company, though he regrets not having friends in childhood now.

Bullying: Gay boys are frequently subjected to harassment from peers and adults, ranging from epithets to violent assaults, and those abused are often gender nonconforming. Gender non conforming boys are not only ridiculed or bullied, they are usually alienated and excluded from group activities (Fagot, 1977). Gay men with a history of gender non conformity frequently recall being loners as children or adolescents (Harry, 1982).

This study supports the existing studies. The participants who recalled themselves as being gender non-conforming were a victim of bullying. Twelve participants faced bullying mainly in school or at home repeatedly. All of them were victims of verbal bullying (name calling). They

recall being called “*janana*”(Womanish), “*ladki*” (Girl), “*hijra*”(Eunuch), “*dheela*”(Gentle), “*gur*”, “*chakka*” (Eunuch)”, “*Bobby darling*” and quite often they were victims of very derogatory statements like “*Go to Raymonds and become a complete man*”, “*You are not a man, prove it if you can*” etc.

Thirteen participants never faced any sort of bullying.

Sexual abuse: Some research finds a direct correlation between child abuse and homosexuality whereas other research expressly denies any correlation (Bell et al, 1981).

The feeling of being “different” can be a cause for exclusion, which in turn leads to being more vulnerable to the instigation and continuation of abuse. This research affirmed the findings of the previous researches. It was found that twelve participants were sexually abused by a person of the same sex in their childhood. The perpetrators were mostly elder cousins or servants. In all cases it was never a single event, instead it lasted for years and was a series of events. Most of the participants confessed liking it and hence never opposed to it. They said that “*It was good to be close to someone at least*”, “*It added fuel to fire*”, “*For the first few times it hurt, but after that it felt really good*”.

Adolescence

Attraction patterns: This section will delineate the attraction patterns of gay men starting from adolescence. Its goal is to explore the age at which the participants felt sexually attracted to someone irrespective of the sex.

Young people come to decisions about their sexual orientation at different points in their age and development. There are significant age differences in reporting of affiliation, same-sex sexual activity and attractions in studies.

The difference in age was observed in this study too. Twenty two participants were attracted to someone for the first time between 10-13 years of age whereas three participants were attracted to someone for the first time between 15-19 years of age.

Also, adolescence is characterized by fluidity and uncertainty in sexual attractions, identities and behavior (Diamond, 2003 as cited in Santrock, 2011). This means that they are subject to change and movement. However, it is also clear that some young people do identify their sexual orientation in adolescence and this remains relatively fixed into adulthood.

In the present study, all participants were not attracted to the same sex during their adolescence. Sixteen participants were attracted to men during adolescence whereas nine participants were attracted to women and these participants have been into heterosexual romantic relationships as

well. It was in the adulthood when these nine participants realized that they were attracted to the same sex.

Acceptance of being attracted to the same sex: Only seven participants said that they could accept that they were attracted to the same sex. On the other hand eighteen participants said they could not accept it straight away that they were attracted to the same sex. They had thoughts like “*It is just a phase*”, “*I will be attracted to girls once I find the right one*”, “*why am I gay? Why am I different?*”, “*It will change with time*”, “*bhagwan ne mujhe hi aisa kyun banaya hai*”, (Why has god made me like this?)

Coming out: ‘Coming out’ is often associated in literature with the integration of one’s sexual identity and the connection of one’s private and public lives. It was also suggested that in addition to this, it is a “renegotiation” of one’s identity once the choice is made to come out to others.

This resonated with what gay men in this study think of ‘coming out’. All participants felt that it is “*sharing something extremely personal with the world*”, “*telling our preference to everyone once and for all*”. In this study seventeen participants ‘came out’ for the first time between 16-21 years of age, three participants between 10-15 years of age, another three participants ‘came out’ between of 22-28 years of age whereas two participants have never ‘come out’ to anyone.

Every individual also had a different trajectory of ‘coming out’. It depended from person to person, who did they come out to, whom they felt ‘coming out’ to and whom they never wanted to.

It was found that seventeen participant’s parents didn’t know that their son is gay and only eight participant’s parents knew about it. Seventeen participants had ‘come out’ to most of their friends, six participants had talked to very few friends and two participants hadn’t disclosed to anyone in their peer group. This clearly shows that gay men are more comfortable in talking to their friends than their parents.

Support systems: Twenty three participants were helped by support systems to come to terms with their sexuality. They mentioned “*Internet*”, “*books*”, “*queer cinema*” and “*LGBT community*” as the support systems that played an integral role. Most of the members said that the LGBT community played a significant role in their lives and helped them become comfortable in their own skin. Hooker (1962) supports this finding. According to him, when homosexuals become affiliated with an organized homosexual group, there is a tendency for them to think of their problem as a subgroup problem and therefore social rather than an individual problem and hence helps the individual to tackle the problems effectively (Cited in Coleman, 1971).

The other roles played by these support groups according to gay men in this study were “*these support systems acted like a source of information*” and “*they helped in meeting more like minded people*”.

Adulthood

Future concerns

Once an individual identifies himself as gay, he tends to think about his future. Adulthood marks the stage where career and relationships are of prime importance. This is the time when a lot of gay men start comparing their lives with straight people.

On being asked whether their life will be different from straight individuals, twenty three participants felt that being gay affected their life in some ways and makes it different from that of the straight people. Whereas two participants felt that being gay wouldn't affect their life in anyway.

The participants said they felt different (in a negative way) from straight individuals because “*gay men have to come out to family and significant others whereas straight people don't have to do that*”, “*they don't have enduring relationships*”, “*at times they are secluded by the straight population*”, “*they can't be themselves and always have to pretend to be someone they are not*”, “*they might be forced to marry a girl*” “*being gay translates into slow professional growth*”, “*they are deemed a criminal in their own country*”.

Only two participants felt that being gay will impact their life in a positive way. Both these participants were from the fashion industry and got an edge in that space being gay.

Presence of Stereotypes: Throughout the history of societies, male homosexuality has long been associated with effeminacy. From the words Molly and Nancy boy of the 18th century to Pansy, she-man androgyne of early 20th century to the present day sissy, fairy, faggot and queen the vocabulary for homosexual men in English language suggests that society equates men's sexual desires for other men with feminine qualities (Pronger, 1990).

The folk theory and intellectual discourse on homosexuality have subscribed to the interpretations that men who have sex with men are women inside men's bodies, and homosexuality is “hermaphroditism of the soul”. It is asserted in 1860s that male homosexuality is a result of “a female soul dropped into a man's body”.

In the 20th century many theorists believed that masculine deficiency was a central characteristic of male homosexuality, and gay men were considered to have “impaired masculine self image”, “a flight from masculinity”, “a search for masculinity”, and “masculine failure”.

The psychological literature on stereotypes and social perception solidly confirms sexual inversion theory i.e. homosexuals acted like the opposite sex, and that homosexual men were suitable only to the “unmasculine careers” of artist, florist and beautician but not the “masculine careers” of doctors and engineers.

Discrimination and stigma are constant companions in the life of the “rainbow people”. Apart from the demand for decriminalization, the main issues that confront the community are discrimination and violence, recognition of alternative family structures, adoption and property rights, and access to social security measures including identity documentation, welfare schemes, and education and health services.

Twenty three participants felt that there are a lot of stereotypes associated with being gay and it leads to discrimination and stigmatization. Majority of participants felt that the stereotypes that exist in our society are “*Gay men behave like girls*”, “*they use a lot of hand gestures*”, “*gays thumak thumak k chalte hain*”(Gay men walk with a lot of grace) “*they have a very flamboyant dressing style*”, “*Gay men are only into artsy professions*”, “*they are promiscuous*”, Whereas only two participants felt that there are no stereotypes associated with being gay.

Opinion of portrayal of homosexuality in media and literature

Being a minority group, gay people are viewed very differently by society. Though many people think there is nothing wrong with being gay, there are many who still believe it is immoral and unnatural. With all the conflicting views existing in society about homosexuals, different portrayals and stereotypes can be seen everywhere. These portrayals send intentional or even unintentional messages to the people witnessing them, thereby molding how people view gay men.

In this study gay men had mixed views. Fourteen participants believe that homosexuality is portrayed in a comic and demeaning way. Five participants believe that media perpetuates stereotypes and six participants are quite happy with the way homosexuality is portrayed in media. According to them “*it tells people about their existence*”.

Majority of the participants didn’t come across any literature that portrays homosexuality.

Sense of utopia: The participants were asked to define their perfect world. They felt that a perfect world for them will be a place where “*Homosexuality is not criminalized*”, “*There is social acceptance and everyone has their basic rights*”, “*There are equal marriage and adoption rights*”.

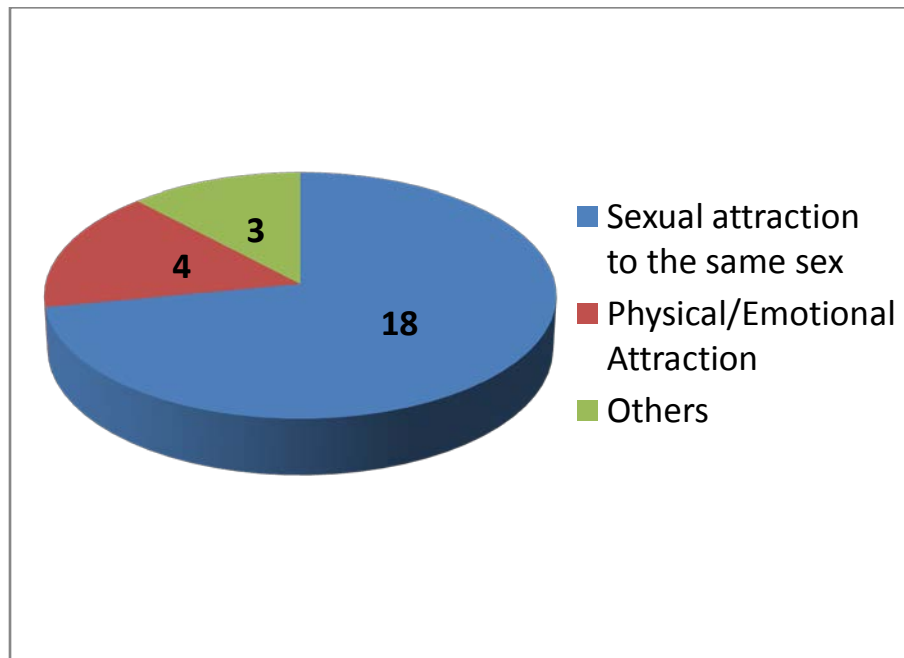
Views and concerns of straight adults

The stigma of homosexuality has been decreasing over the past few years. However, many countries are still unwelcoming towards homosexually oriented individuals. Across the world today, the debate over homosexuality continues, with great variation in public opinion about the acceptability of homosexuality, laws regulating same sex unions and penalties for sexual behaviors. In many cultures, homosexual people are frequently subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Like members of many other minority groups that are the objects of prejudice, they are also subject to stereotyping, which further adds to marginalization. The prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping are all likely tied to forms of homophobia and heterosexism, which is negative attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. Heterosexism can include the presumption that everyone is heterosexual or that opposite-sex attractions and relationships are the norm and therefore superior. In almost all cultures, men hold a more negative attitude towards the homosexuals and tend to judge more male than female homosexuality.

Knowledge of Homosexuality

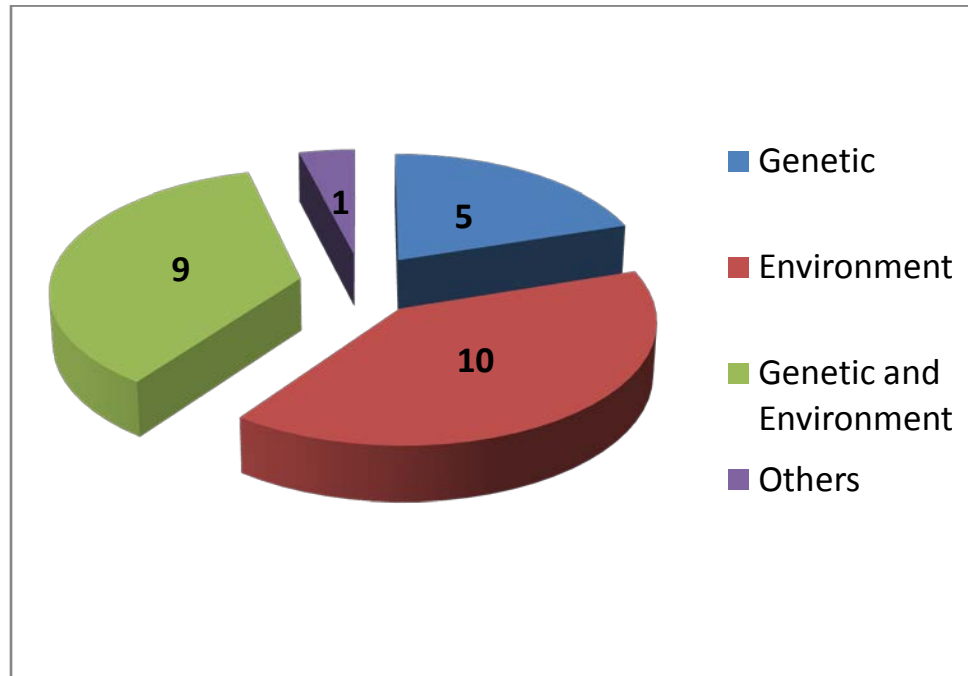
Meaning of homosexuality: In the present study, eighteen participants said that according to them homosexuality is “*sexual attraction to the same sex*”, four participants said that its “*physical/emotional attraction towards the same sex*”, and three participants didn’t have a clear understanding of the term homosexuality. They said its “*a different way of lifestyle*”, “*liking between two males*”, “*the urge of showing animalistic love*”. (Refer to Figure 6.)

Figure 6. Meaning of Homosexuality



Causes of homosexuality: Any human behavior is the result of complex intermingling of genetics and environment. The participants held similar views. Five participants felt the causes of homosexuality are purely genetic/ biological. Ten participants felt that homosexuality is caused by environmental factors, nine participants feel that homosexuality is caused by both biological and environmental factors and one participant felt that it is caused by weakness of the mind. (Refer to Figure 7.)

Figure 7. Causes of Homosexuality



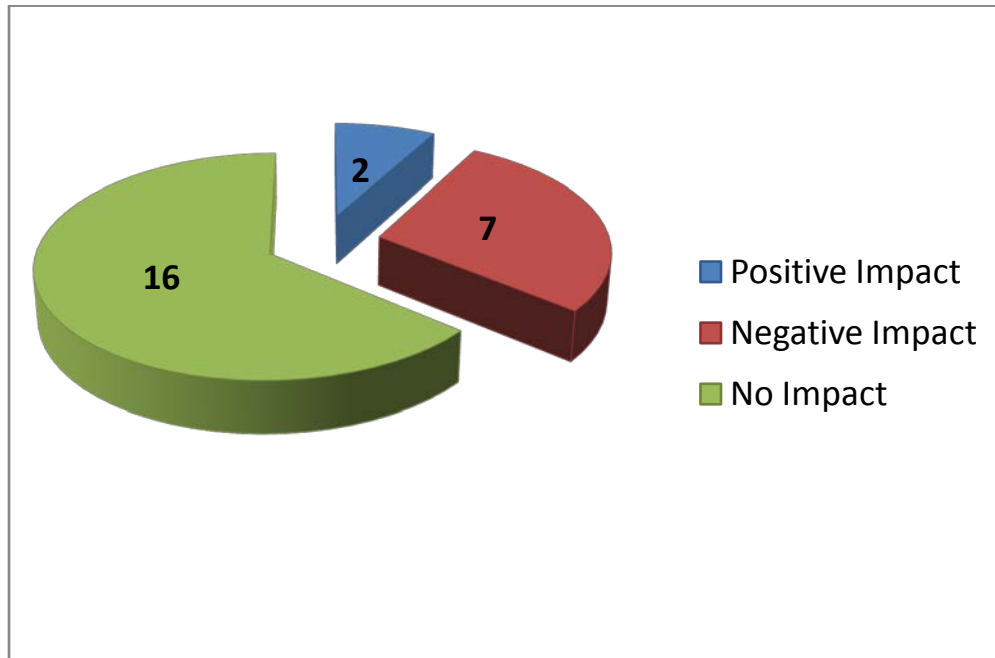
Existence of homosexuality: Nineteen participants believe that homosexuality has existed since ages. They said that it was practiced by our own gods and it can be seen in Indian mythology and architecture. Four participants felt that homosexuality is a very recent phenomenon.

Concerns regarding Homosexuality

Impact on society: Seven participants felt that homosexuality has a negative impact on the society. According to them, “Children in the foundation years can have an adverse impact on their minds because of homosexuality”, “homosexuality is corrupting the society, so many youngsters are falling prey to easy sex for casual and monetary reasons, most of them are not even aware of safe sex practices thus resulting in such high numbers of HIV-AIDS patients.”, “The number of gays is increasing which is an unhealthy development from mankind evolution point of view. These people give rise to prostitution”, “Agar ye cheez badhti hai, toh society ko farak padega. Shaadi ka matlab hai having a companion and having babies jo aise relationships mein possible nahi hai”(If this thing increases, it will impact the society. the meaning of marriage is to have a companion and have babies which is not possible in such relationships)

Two participants felt that homosexuality has a positive impact on the society. They said that “*More the people love each other, more harmony would prevail*” and “*there will be less horny men*”(Refer to figure 8.)

Figure 8. Impact of Homosexuality on Society



Reactions towards hypothetical personal encounters with homosexuality

Reaction to the confession by a family member that he/she is gay: Fourteen participants said that they will have a positive reaction if a family member confesses that he or she is gay. They will accept the person in every possible way and help him/her feel comfortable. Nine participants said that they will have a negative reaction and they wouldn't support homosexuality in any way. Two participants said that they will be indifferent to the situation.

Reaction to the confession by child that he/she is gay: Sixteen said that they will accept their child if he / she confesses about being gay. Whereas, nine participants said that they won't accept their child if he/ she is gay.

Understanding of Homosexuality by professionals

Davidson (1976) argued that the very existence of sexual reorientation treatment programs strengthens prejudices against homosexual individuals and increase their self hatred and embarrassment (Cited in Carson & Butcher ,1992)

The insight into attitudes of medical professionals towards homosexuality is of great importance gay population is under higher risk of developing anxiety and mental disorders. Attitudes of

health professionals can influence the willingness to provide help to homosexual patients and consequently the quality of health care and treatment.

Knowledge of Homosexuality

Meaning of homosexuality: In the present study, five out of six professionals said that *“homosexuality is a preference for the same sex/gender”*. One professional said that *“it’s a pattern of behavior whenever there is attraction to the same sex invariably starting in adolescence coupled with lack of attraction in the opposite sex”*

Causes of homosexuality: Four professionals said that it is purely environmental and two participants said it is genetic. They are born that way.

Views on the removal of Homosexuality from DSM

From the publication of DSM-II in 1968 until 1973, homosexuality was listed as a sexual deviation. In 1973 the Nomenclature committee of the American Psychiatric Association, under pressure from many professionals and from gay activist groups, recommended the elimination of the category homosexuality and the substitution of sexual orientation disturbance.

This new diagnosis was to be applied to gay men and women who are “disturbed by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation”. The members of the psychiatric association voted on the issue, and the change was approved, but not without vehement protests from several renowned psychiatrists who remained convinced that homosexuality reflects a fixation at an early stage of psychosexual development and is therefore inherently abnormal.

In this study, five professionals were happy with the decision as according to them it is not a mental disorder whereas one professional said that this decision is wrong and homosexuality should be treated as a mental disorder.

Approach in dealing with Homosexuality in practice

Only three professionals have come across gay people in their private practice. These three professionals helped the gay individual by *“Psychotherapy”, “Making him ventilate abreaction”, “Psycho-education”, “Psychotropic drug and counseling”*

Legal perspective of Homosexuality in India

Legal history of Homosexuality in India

There is no explicit mention of homosexuality or homophilia in any of the statute books of India. A person cannot be prosecuted for being a homosexual or homophilic. But the sexual act of sodomy is a criminal offence. The major provisions of criminalization of same-sex acts is found in the Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860.

Section 377 of IPC reads, "of unnatural offences: Who ever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years and shall also be liable to fine. Penetration is sufficient to constitute carnal intercourse necessary for the offence described in this section.

It is an archaic colonial law that was brought in by the British. The section seems neutral in that it criminalizes certain sexual acts and not people and their identities. However, it has never been used against consenting heterosexual persons and has been misused against homosexual persons. The primary problem with the provision of law is that it does not take into consideration age or consent. Therefore, it criminalizes adult consensual same sex acts.

The fight against section 377 has been going on since 2001 before the courts. It started with the petition by Naz Foundation before the High Court of Delhi. Subsequently Naz Foundation was joined by other petitioners. The Delhi High court gave its judgment in Naz Foundation v NCT of Delhi wherein Section 377 of the IPC was read down to not apply to consenting adult consensual acts in private. The Delhi High Court held that Section 377 is against constitutional values embedded in Article 14 (Right to Equality), Article 15 (Non Discrimination) and Article 21 (Right to Life).

The High Court of Delhi declared that "section 377 IPC, insofar it criminalizes consensual sexual acts of adults in private, is a violation of Article 21, 14 and 15 of the Constitution". The High Court relied on affidavits, FIRs, Judgments and Orders to illustrate misuse of Section 377; they also places reliance on academic literature, scientific and medical literature, international law, constituent assembly debates, comparative jurisdictions and judgments of superior courts in India.

The High Court held that the right to life cannot be restricted by what the majority thinks and that Section 377 violates the right to dignity and privacy guaranteed under Article 21. The court further held that no one can be discriminated on the basis of their sexual orientation and that the provision is violation of right to equality.

Present Legal status of homosexuality in India

The Supreme Court reversed the judgment of the Delhi High Court on 11th December 2013 and held that Section 377 does not violate the Constitution and is therefore valid. The Supreme Court reasoned its judgment on several grounds. First, it held that all laws enacted by Parliament are presumed to be valid under the Constitution. This means that in order to hold a law to be invalid, it must be shown, through evidence, that the law is violating the Constitution. The Supreme Court held that there is not enough evidence to show that Section 377 IPC is invalid under the Constitution. The Court held that there is very little evidence to show that the provision is being

misused by the police. Also, just because the police may be misusing a law, does not automatically mean that the law is invalid. There must be something in the nature of the law itself that is unconstitutional.

According to the Supreme Court, the law can be implemented without misuse. It was also argued before the Supreme Court that because Section 377 applies to certain sexual conduct, it essentially means that all forms of sexual expression by LGBT people would be unnatural. This would mean that any sexual conduct by such people would be illegal. Therefore, Section 377 prohibits all sexual expression of LGBT persons. The Supreme Court disagreed with this argument and held that Section 377 speaks only of sexual acts and does not speak about sexual orientation or gender identity. This would mean that even heterosexuals indulging in acts covered under Section 377 would be punished. Therefore, the section does not target LGBT persons as a class.

Further, the Supreme Court held that the Delhi High Court in its anxiety to uphold the so called rights of LGBT persons had relied on cases from other countries. They are of the opinion that cases from other countries cannot be directly used in the context of India. Therefore, important cases from South Africa, Fiji, Nepal, USA etc where homosexuality was decriminalized was not taken into account by the Supreme Court. Laws are presumed to be valid therefore the responsibility of changing laws is with the parliament.

In this case also parliament is free to consider deleting or changing Section 377. The Supreme Court also said that despite so many years the Parliament has not changed the law in spite of having ample opportunities to do so. In light of the above factors considered, the Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Delhi High Court and upheld section 377.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In this research an attempt has been made to understand the lives of homosexual men in India through their self-narrated experiences. This was followed by exploring the views and concerns of the society towards homosexuality and studying the understanding of the phenomenon by professionals.

When I decided to undertake this study on homosexuality, I had several preconceptions that clouded my mind. This could be attributed to our social and cultural conditioning that for years at a stretch has viewed homosexuality from an unnatural and condescending frame of lens.

Battling my own conceptions due to the limited research available in Indian context and the stereotypes and conventions that surrounded homosexuality and directly gay men, I had my own apprehensions on undertaking this study. The fear of push-backs and presentiments of gay men and the society around the subject of homosexuality concerned me as potential obstacles in the way of materializing this research.

My own homophobic notions were replaced by a strong understanding of the sexuality of gay men, their lives and experiences. I clearly made the distinction of stereotypes from generalizations and conventions in the course of the study.

I strongly believe that homosexuality, just like any other sexual orientation, results from a complex co-action of biological and social factors. Majority of Indian homosexuals, many of whom still live with the parents refer to their partners as friends for fear of being disowned by their families. Many are forcibly married off, trapped in a cycle of pretence and deception and facing social ridicule if they attempted to come out. And those who can live together do not advertise their sexuality, for fear of being evicted by landlords or preyed upon by the corrupt police who extort money from them on threat of exposure.

The perception of the society has been particularly harsh on homosexuals and a great amount of these social structures hinder the equity each homosexual deserves. This is a result of lack of awareness around the subject from a scientific point of view and also a blatant ignorance of its mentions in our ancient relics.

I feel that the recent Supreme Court ruling on section 377 has hurt the sentiment and right to life of every gay man, it also extended a much needed opportunity for the society to actually know what homosexuality is and the science behind this sexuality. It is evident that gay men in India still face severe discrimination from society, law and all other hetero-patriarchal institutions, and the sphere of discrimination is visible at both sides-public as well as private. Therefore, challenging homophobia and transphobia as complex and multi-dimensional processes requires

us to think differently about gender and sexual orientation and about how social institutions are structured.

It is extremely unfortunate for a significant section of the society living under an unimaginably disheartening affliction of the society and law that earmarks them as criminals under section 377. This has not only restricted their right to equal mobility in social and physical spaces but also lacerates them with the concern around revealing their true sexuality and its consequences. This affects every sphere of their life, also curbing personal and professional opportunities of growth and development, both being highly influenced and depreciated by the legal provisions of our country and social structures.

I do believe that gay men should get equal constitutional entitlement of uninhibited right to expression of sexuality and its constructs, decriminalization of homosexuality, social acceptance and equal marriage and adoption rights. It is highly unfortunate for an equal gender to be living a restrained life just because of their sexual orientation. The study has made me more empathetic toward the grounded and powerful notion that right to life is equal to all, irrespective of their gender (sexual orientation) and sexual preferences.

There were several constraints in the research. The morality around peering into someone's personal and intimate space was of ethical concern. It takes immense grounding and extensive preparation to venture into personal and close knitted aspect of anyone's life and while doing so, it is all the more imminent to address those concerns for sound ethical and moral conduct. Conscious efforts were made to keep the group as viably large as possible and equally diverse. The fact that a majority of gay men are closeted and more introvert about it post the Supreme Court ruling restricted the diversity of the group. The group dynamics of gay men could have been diversified to include married gay men, gay men of older age, different socio-economic backgrounds, educational backgrounds etc. Most of these constraints surfaced as a result of time related concerns but efforts were made nonetheless to counter them in the best possible way to expand the range of the research.

CHAPTER 5

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